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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Syria/Yemen, Syria/Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories
(1/29)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Jan. 29 reported President Asad's meeting in Yemen on Jan. 28 with Yemeni Prime Minister, Abdul-Qader Bajmal. Talks focused on regional and international developments and meetings of the Syrian-Yemeni Higher Committee.

On the issue of Iraq, papers reported Foreign Minister Mouallem's meeting with Ashraf Qadi, UN Special Envoy on Iraq, on Jan. 28. Headlines featured a press statement by Qadi following the meeting, confirming Syria's interest in Iraq's stability and security. Qadi pointed out that his visit to Syria is a part of his tour to the neighboring countries of Iraq aiming at mobilizing efforts to achieve stability in Iraq on political, security, and economic levels. Earlier, Mr. Mouallem and Qadi reviewed developments in the Iraqi arena and the role that could be played by the UN in Iraq within the framework of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Mr. Mouallem emphasized Syria's keenness to cooperate with the UN to make the current political process in Iraq a success and to help the Iraqis overcome the ordeal they are passing through. He underlined the significance of holding a comprehensive conference for national reconciliation in Iraq.

As for Lebanon, papers featured a speech broadcast by al-Manar satellite TV channel on Jan. 28 by Hizbollah SecGen Nasrallah, confirming that "the Lebanese opposition will not surrender or leave the conspirators to destroy Lebanon or undermine its civil peace, and will not be dragged into using weapons inside the country." The Hezbollah chief called for formation of an investigative committee to look into the events which occurred on the campus of Beirut Arab University on Jan. 25 and bring those who were responsible to justice.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad reviews regional and international developments, and meetings of the Syrian-Yemeni Higher Committee, with Yemeni Prime Minister Bajmal. The Syrian-Yemeni Higher Committee wraps up activities by signing 13 agreements and memos of understanding" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/29)

"Foreign Minister Mouallem receives Ambassador of Japan and UN Envoy on Iraq. Mouallem calls for holding a conference for Iraqi reconciliation and ending foreign occupation of Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/29)

"Violent clashes in Najaf. A US helicopter is shot down in Iraq. Whole crew and three US soldiers were killed" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/29)

"Federation of Arab Trade Union condemns assaults against Syrian workers in Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/29)

"Nasrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah: Sit-ins will continue. The opposition will not allow conspirators to demolish Lebanon. Some leaders in the governing team endeavor to plan sedition" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/29)

"Over 58 percent of Americans want President Bush to quit immediately" (Government-owned Tisheen, 1/29)

"The situation in Nablus deteriorates. Hanieh calls for withdrawing gunmen. Islamic Jihad expects a cool-down" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/29)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Political Abnormality"

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (1/29): "Since the American-Israeli plan for the region has failed to achieve its objectives through wars and political and

economic pressure, it is now trying to achieve its objectives through the creation of domestic sedition....

"Internal sedition will only harm Arab peoples in Lebanon and Palestine.... We know that the situation in Lebanon is extremely bizarre, in that the government itself is creating trouble and chaos in search of domestic strife. It is possible to explain this bizarre situation in Lebanon, especially if we read the records of the government leaders: They are warlords who retired involuntarily at some stage and are now back to the game at which they are skilled. In Palestine, however, the situation causes much dismay, as we see Palestinian guns pointed in the wrong direction. The biggest offense to the Palestinian struggle is to see a drop of Palestinian blood shed by a Palestinian....

"Palestinians must demonstrate wisdom and stop harming themselves.... Although the heavy smoke in the region makes it difficult to see the rays of optimism, we are sure that failure will be the fate of the sedition plan.... There is no alternative to dialogue and agreement."

"Intra-Palestinian Fight Assassinate Dialogue"

Ahmad Suwwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (1/29): "The intra-Palestinian clashes push the entire Palestinian cause into a dark tunnel.... This will bring disaster for the Palestinian people if the fighting does not stop and the factions do not return to a serious and thorough dialogue to reach a comprehensive agreement on national bases ensuring the achievement of a Palestinian national unity and the formation of a national unity government....

"Palestinian factions were close to an agreement before the clashes erupted.... A certain group obviously seeks to create domestic strife and prevent Palestinians from reaching an agreement....

"We add nothing new and reveal no secret if we say that the Palestinian people know this group well. They experienced its

malicious attempts many times in the past, when it violated Palestinian blood to serve its interests, privileges, and trade in Palestinian blood...."

"Peace in Words"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (1/29): "Those who believe that Israel seeks a peace that ultimately ends the Arab-Israel conflict and returns rights to their legitimate owners are mistaken.... Israel and the United States are agreed on a common vision that cannot in any way lead to a peace acceptable by all sides.... Israel and the United States are exploiting the issue of peace to serve domestic agendas and win more time...."

"Why was the issue of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, on the terms that Israeli Foreign Minister Livni proposed in Davos, raised at a time when the Palestinian factions were coming closer to an agreement on a unity government? Can Israel be cleared of responsibility for the recent bloody incidents in Gaza?"

"The achievement of peace needs few words and much action and commitment to the known principles of peace. Most of what is being proposed now violates and contradicts this rule. So the least that can be said about the Israeli peace statements is that they are sugar-coated words...."

"Crisis of a Track"

Ali Nasrallah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (1/29): "What Lebanon is witnessing today is more than a political rift between two camps or a struggle for power. Rather, it is a crisis of direction and a deep difference between those who want Lebanon to be a follower of the United States and Israel and those who believe in resisting occupation and hegemonic plans and who are firmly convinced that the United States and Israel are the exclusive source of all evils in the world...."

"The governing team in Lebanon long hid behind the slogans of freedom, sovereignty, and independence. But its practices on the ground exposed it and showed its true nature as a team relinquishing those slogans and values, placing Lebanon under trusteeship, opening the country to violations by Israeli and Western intelligence, and turning Lebanon into a base for the implementation of the neoconservatives' new or greater Middle East...."

Corbin